



Miami University

This university may be celebrating 200 years of operations, but not by resting on success. David Hodge explains how it is using an engaged learning model to prepare students for the future.

An Engaging



Experience



A bicentennial is a momentous event for any institution. Ohio's Miami University reached its bicentennial in 2009, having been chartered in 1809, and is now taking the steps to continue pushing the evolution of education for another two centuries.

With about 16,000 students on its main campus in Oxford, Ohio, 6,000 students on its two regional campuses, and an international campus in Luxembourg, David Hodge, president, said the main thing separating this university from many others is what students, alumni, faculty, and staff refer to as the "Miami experience." By blending a classic, immersive collegiate experience on the academic side with an active co-curricular life, Miami has nurtured and cultivated an engaged student body.

With academic initiatives, the university focuses on an engaged learning model that builds on its common liberal arts and science foundation. Traditional education techniques are passive, with students essentially waiting to be told what they need to know. Instead, Miami pushes students to be driven by inquiry.

"The boundaries today between where the classroom ends and co-curricular life begins are blurred," said Hodge. "Because of technology, everything from well-equipped science research labs to the vast array of raw research material available online, students need to adopt a frame of mind that extends their curiosity into the world of discovery."

One way the university emphasizes this is through its Top 25 initiative. The project identified and targeted Miami's 25 highest enrolled classes and challenged departments to improve classes by creating interactive and engaging learning experiences. Miami held a series of competitions over the last three years with five or six new courses brought on each year. Awards aren't given to an individual faculty member. To be considered for a grant, a group must consist of at least three people within a department, and one must be tenured. From there, the team works with other departments, including IT, curricular design, and the writing center, to use Miami's resources collectively to create institutional change.

It isn't always easy to get students and faculty to adapt to the model, so Miami is providing both with as much support as they need for the transition. With students, the model is often counterintuitive to traditional education. Consider this fact—when the university first started, students caught studying with another would be fined 25 cents. Now, engaged collaborative learning is the norm, and one area where this is on display is in Miami's first-level marketing class.

"It has an inverted classroom model. Students watch lectures online and work on group projects inside the classroom," Hodge said. "This is collaborative learning in real time with the professor. These types of initiatives greatly increase students' skills at being engaged learners."

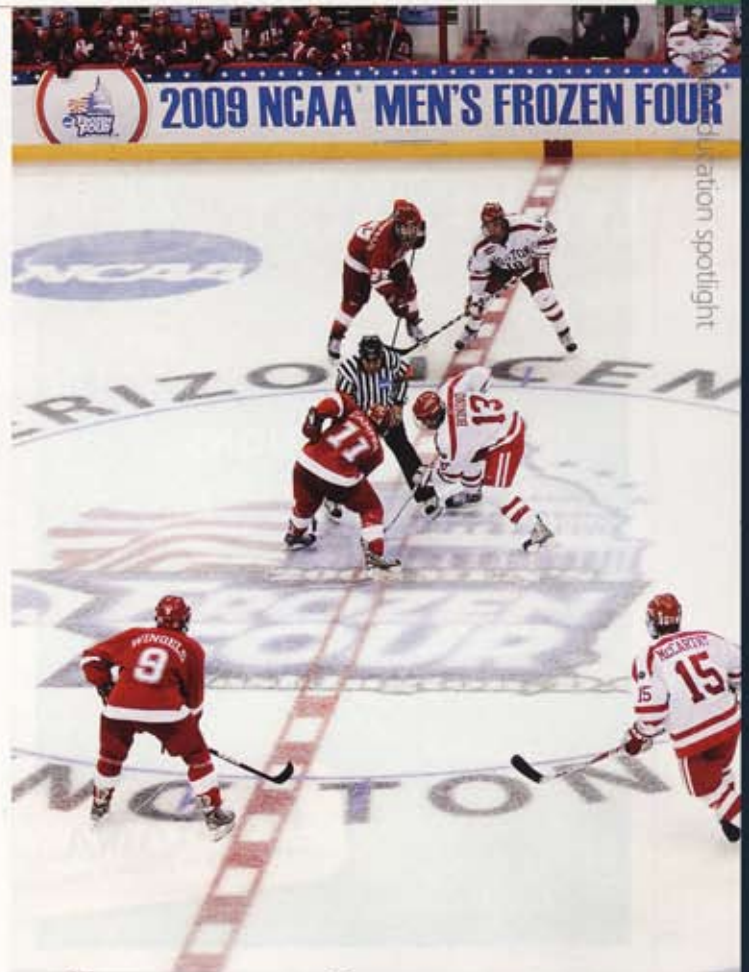
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On the faculty side, Miami has a long-standing tradition of forming what Hodge called faculty learning communities, part of a faculty commitment to curricular innovation. Typically, these communities are made up of a dozen faculty members who commit to working together for at least a semester, and often a year, to focus on a particular theme regarding improving education. Combined with the Top 25 initiative, the university has a critical mass of people voluntarily participating in the process of advancing Miami's educational experience.

Building tomorrow's leaders

The co-curricular side of Miami is equally important to Hodge because



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of the emphasis the university places on student initiative. There are about 350 student-led organizations on campus. As a result, Miami recently ranked second in the nation in terms of the proportion of seniors with significant leadership experience. This is another tradition stretching back to Miami's beginning. In Miami's second year of existence, students independently founded two literary societies. Two years later, Miami students founded what is now the oldest collegiate newspaper in the country.

"These activities build the capacities and intangibles our students need in order to be leaders," Hodge said. "We have many organizations and student activities that put students in positions of responsibility, and we encourage them to take that initiative on their own."

Examples of this focus are many. Miami is one of only two universities with a student-run credit union. In addition, when the university needed a logo to celebrate its bicentennial, it went to one of its design classes instead of outside consultants. Student initiative is also evident. For example, two summers ago, a rising Miami senior approached President Hodge concerned about the university's lack of progress on sustainability. On her own, she had solicited Philips to donate 3,500 compact fluorescent light bulbs to be given to first-year students, along with reusable cloth bags donated by retail food chain Kroger. And she wanted more action from the university.

"Because of her initiative, I appointed her to be one of three co-leaders of our task force on sustainability, along with a staff member and a faculty member, but she was the engine behind it," said Hodge. "Our sustainability program and plan is 90% the result of one student's initiative to push the university forward."



Many changes are helping Miami create the next generation of academic success. This year, there is a sophomore residency program for the first time, requiring sophomores to live on campus or with an approved fraternity. By having sophomores and first-year students living together in community-based and themed residence halls, people are placed together based on shared interests, further blurring the lines between where the classroom ends and co-curricular activities begin.

Beyond that, Miami created new programs. One in particular, AIMS (Armstrong Institute for Interactive Media Studies), is an interdisciplinary program looking at the ways digital media impacts traditional education disciplines. Each of Miami's five academic divisions has a stake in AIMS.

With its facilities, Miami is modernizing, transitioning from old school academic buildings with lecture halls and classrooms off the hallway to new buildings with informal learning spaces. Recently, Miami built new psychology and engineering buildings that fit this model, and its new Farmer School of Business opened this year. It has a trading floor with 38 stations run by simulation software, allowing students to conduct real time trading of everything from commodities to equities and beyond. That is an example of how Miami creates academic experiences as close to the real world as possible.

What matters to Miami more than anything is student success. The measures it uses to track that success rate revolve around placement of students once they graduate. Results show Miami is succeeding in its mission. This spring, *Business Week* ranked the Farmer School as the 18th-highest rated undergraduate business school in the country, and employer satisfaction with Miami graduates was fourth in the nation. The same commitment to success drives Miami's exceptional record for placing students in graduate, medical, and law schools.

"Those indicators are most important to us. Our strategy is to focus greater attention on using co-curricular experiences to build the capacity for leadership and give students the values and social skills they need to build on their rigorous academic experience," Hodge said. "We are building the engaged learning model because effective engaged learning yields better results for our students, not only when they graduate, but throughout their lifetimes." ■

—Eric Slack



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to
**Dr. David Hodges
and
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on your Bicentennial!**

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